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AUTHOR Allen, K. Eileen
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ABSTRACT

If preschool teachers are to plan for each child on the basis of his or her needs, they must engage in several basic program adaptation procedures. They must know how to assess each child's individual skill levels in each area of development. They must also understand task analysis and be able to specify learning objectives for each child. Additionally, teachers must be adept at evaluating the program in terms of short- and long-term goals for individual children and for the group as a whole. Assessment of children's developmental skills can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including collecting information from anecdotal notes, language samples, counts and durations measures, criterion-referenced assessments, checklists, and rating scales. Teachers will need to employ task analysis as needed by individual children learning specific complex tasks in the context of routines, instructional periods, and exploration activities. Based on individual assessments and task analysis outcomes, learning objectives specified for each child should mesh with philosophically based program objectives. Another often neglected aspect of program adaptation involves frequent reevaluation of the total program. Adaptations encompassing the entire program can be accomplished by adjusting schedules, changing learning materials, and altering instructional activities and formats. (RH)

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THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM: ADAPTATION TO THE INDIVIDUAL CHILD

K. Eileen Allen

Professor of Human Development

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Introduction

After the children are enrolled and adjusted to the preschool or daycare experience teachers begin to adapt the learning environment in various ways. Program adaptations focus primarily on two elements: the individual skill levels of the children and the particular learnings needed by each child.

To provide learning experiences suitable for each individual a major evaluation of children and the overall program must take place soon after the start of the school year. Even during the adaptation period teachers will be getting some clues as to learnings that are needed and learnings that are already in place. Certain children, for example, will display a well-rounded set of self-help skills from the start while others will be needing many opportunities to learn skills as simple as slipping out of a sweater.

A good program is never static, never rigid, never locked into a formula or inflexible format. Neither is a good program prescribed; it is not an entity that comes before child learning; rather it is developed on the basis of child needs and is imposed upon the framework that has been discussed in the earlier chapters of this text. In a very real sense, the needs of children as individual learners dictate the program.

Principles of Program Adaptation

If teachers are to plan for each child on the basis of his or her needs they must engage in several basic procedures. They must know how to assess children in terms of each child's individual skill levels in each area of development. They must also understand task analysis, know how to break a task down into its component parts and present the steps in an orderly sequence. Based upon the foregoing procedures and their overall knowledge of child development teacher needs to be able to specify learning objectives for each child. And, finally, teachers

must be adept at evaluating the program in terms of short and long-term goals for individual children and for the group as a whole. Each of these teaching procedures will be discussed in somewhat more detail in the sections to follow.

Assessment

Assessment of children's developmental skills can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Direct and systematic observations of each child is of utmost importance. Few professionals are better qualified than the preschool or daycare teacher to make observations upon which to base a program for young children. They have been trained in child development, know children firsthand, have daily contact with the vast array of developmental differences that characterize young children, and they see children over long periods of time in a naturalistic environment where children are comfortable and free to be themselves.

Direct observations can take many forms. One of the time-honored and traditional methods is the running record, the writing down of everything a child says and does while it is happening. Running records are fairly easy to do and require no special training. They are particularly useful for getting a picture of the child in the context of the total environment -- the child's interactions with teachers, children, space, and equipment.

These records are written in everyday language and can be used to gather information about particular children, to assess group processes, to evaluate the curriculum, and to appraise the effectiveness of certain materials or equipment. The great advantage of the running record is that it is an easy recording system that provides "detailed accounts of behavior which preserve the sequence of behavior, the environmental influences, and the responses of others in the setting" (Irwin and Bushnell, 1980 p. 109). The main disadvantage is that the technique is time consuming, not only in the actual process of gathering the data but also in terms of analyzing the records and synthesizing the information so that it is functional for reporting progress and planning learning objectives.

Anecdotal notes

Anecdotal notes, brief recordings on discrete episodes of behavior, are another widely used and simple form of assessing a child's performance on various developmental tasks. Anecdotal notes are also a means for evaluating various aspects of the learning environment. All that is required is a small note pad (preferably 3" x 5" in size to assure that notes are indeed brief and concise) and a pencil. Notes can be taken anytime and anyplace to immediately record the occurrence of a particular piece of behavior or brief episode considered to be important by the teacher.

Notes of this type are useful in a number of ways. In the beginning of the year they are valuable in getting to know children -- the motor behaviors, concepts, social skills, and self-help repertoire displayed by particular children. Continued throughout the year the notes can provide a simple measure for evaluating progress in the acquisition of various skills and to pinpoint areas in which the child may need additional help. In recording both the running record and the anecdotal note it is important for the observer to be objective and to avoid personal interpretations. Instead of saying the one child did not like it when another accidentally kicked the blocks down, the children's behavior should be described as follows:

> Charlene was in the block area working on a tall, unevenly balanced block structure.
>
> Kim, who had been watching, pointed to an off-center block and said, "You need to make that one straight."
>
> At that moment the entire structure fell down.
>
> Charlene stamped her feet, kicked the blocks about and said to Kim in a loud voice, "You did it. You made it fall down. You get out of here."
>
> Kim walked away.

The foregoing example, in addition to demonstrating objective reporting, also demonstrates other important aspects of a good observation. The subject child

her location, and what the child was doing was identified at the outset. The responses of others were accurately recorded. In this instance, the observer was able to note that the second child did not actually touch the block structure though a busy teacher might have assumed the opposite. The children's exact words were recorded, too. There are times when the observer must record be able to hear the exact verbalizations. Nevertheless, the observer must record whatever aspects are audible or indicate that there was verbal responding even though the observer could not make it out. Furthermore, the note, as would any good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and the events recorded sequentially.

One way of organizing the ancedotal notes for ready use is to keep a file folder on each child with the 3 x 5 notes separated as to areas of development or by curriculum areas. These dated notes, filed chronologically and categorically, provide an ongoing evaluation of each child throughout the school year. As program changes are made, these, too, should be noted so that the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies or interventions can be assessed.

Language samples

Because language is central to cognitive and to social development, it is important to assess each child to make sure that his or her language development is progressing satisfactorily. When taking language samples, the teacher writes down verbatim (sound for sound and word for word) a broad sampling of utterances made by the child in natural situations. Free play and snack time are particularly useful periods for assessing a child's language to find out if it is functional--that is, to find cut if a child's language works in such a way as to get the child what he or she wants--the cooperation of a peer, the attention of a teacher, an additional set of materials, a turn on the tricycle, another cracker.

Language samples can tell teachers a number of things about the children and the program. Are children using language freely? Among those children who are using language freely, are their language skills expanding and elaborating over the course of the year? Are some children not talking enough; or not talking well enough? Have program alterations been made for these children? Are the program alternatives effective?

Counts and Durations Measures

The foregoing assessment techniques, running records, anecdotal notes, and language samples, while useful, do not yield information that is readily quantifiable. Yet the responses of children that can be counted is the type of data that is oftentimes most useful and most easily collected and analyzed by busy teachers actively engaged in facilitating children's learning in the preschool and daycare classroom. Take for example, the issue of question-asking by children. Teachers have long espoused this form of child behavior as an important aspect of learning through play; therefore, to encourage it, they arrange an environment that prompts exploration, curiousity, and information seeking. But are these desired child behaviors actually occurring, and what happens when they do occur? Children's question-asking is a good case in point. Is question-asking by children actually occurring within this carefully planned environment? If so, to what degree? And, if children are asking questions, are their questions being responded to by teachers? (Friendly warning: Do not answer that question without doing some actual observing.) If questions are being answered, then in what fashion? Does the answer simply supply the child with the requested information: "It's red," thus closing off further learning? Are the answers open-ended: "Is it the same color as your

shirt? and Marti's pants?," thus inviting the child to further cognitive activity? (Allen & Ruggles, 1981). With very little effort, teachers can help to answer these important questions by observing each other for brief times and jotting down (1) the name of the child who asks a question; (2) if an answer is forthcoming; and (3) if an answer is given, is it done in a manner that evokes still another response from the child?

There are even simpler quantity time measures that are also of great usefulness. If teachers are interested in attention span in one or more children, they can do very simple forms of data collection such as jotting down start and stop time directly on paintings, collages, or wood glueing creations. It takes very little extra time to note the time in addition to writing the child's name and date (which teachers do so automatically). There can also be slips of paper prepared in advance with children's names on them posted in the various activity centers. Particular children's times of entry and leaving can be noted in order to assess how various individuals spend their time. Or teachers might simply note to what extent each interest center is patronized, thus gathering information for more effective program planning in general.

If teachers are concerned with what they judge may be excesses of certain behaviors in some children (or, limited occurrences of a desired behavior) simple counts or durations measures can be used to gather information needed for effective programming. Teachers might keep track of such things as how many times each free play period one child falls down; how many times another child runs into children with a tricycle; or how many times a third child cries and clings to a teacher. Teachers can also ask questions such as how long does one child stay at music or another spend in isolate play? Such information can corroborate that a problem does or does not exist (the staff must decide what is "too much" or "too little" of any behavior in terms of their own program philosophy). Continuing to collect the same kind of information will allow, also, the staff to ascertain if subsequent program changes and specfic interventions

with particular children are effective.

The use of standardized IQ tests or achievement tests as guides to assessing children's abilities and to developing teaching programs fell into something less than favorable repute in the 1960's when it became so abundantly apparent that these tests and their administration were negatively discriminating against children of other than middle class background. Almy (1975), in discussing standardized tests, noted several years ago that there were too many tests, that many of them were poor, and that the better tests were often used inappropriately. She observed, too, that tests properly selected and administered do have some usefulness, but for the most, do not encompass the variety of skills and knowledge children acquire in a rich and individualized learning environment (p. 224). Lillie (1975) too, has questioned the use of standardized tests with young children. He suggests that the use of scores derived from a standardized IQ test may even impede the development of a good program for a given child. Lillie notes that while the test score tells the teacher what large numbers of other children did (in the sample upon which the test was standardized), that score says little that is useful about a particular child and his or her uniqueness and developmental variations (p. 31).

In an effort to overcome such problems a tremendous array of preschool assessment tools and screening instruments have been devised during the past fifteen years. Nearly 100 were cited in an annotated bibliography done in 1977 by Cross and Goin. In these tests, the number of developmental items range from a thousand or more (Cohen & Gross, 1975) to relatively few as in the Denver Developmental Screening Test (Frankenburg 19).

The use of these less formal assessment instruments by preschool teachers themselves has gained steadily in favor. Teachers know their children and they know the particular educational and philosophic format in which the child's learning is to occur. This kind of assessment, guaging children's skill levels in all areas of development within the classroom framework is truly useful in adapting programs to the individual child. It gives the teacher a clear message:

if the child is not learning and developing optimally, it is the learning environment that must be adjusted.

Many assessment instruments are useful, however, in detecting developmental delays or deviations in young children. By way of example, one of the better known tests will be mentioned briefly. The Denver Developmental Screening Test (Frankenburg, 197) covers gross motor, fine motor, language, and personal-social skills. All together the test presents 105 items covering an age range from early infancy through six years of age. Usually no more than 20 items of the total are used on any one child. The test (and its new short form, the DPDQ) is used extensively be pediatricians, public health nurses, and other clinicians in various settings, as well as by teachers. A note of caution that must be given in discussing the DDST, as well as any other assessment or screening tool, is that screening instruments must never be used for diagnosis of a developmental problem, nor for evaluation of program effectiveness. As an aside, the process of evaluation is often seen as something quite separate from assessment. Assessment, according to Lillie (1975), "refers to the process of determining the child's strengths and weaknesses in specific areas of development" while evaluation focuses on describing "how successful a teacher, or an instructional program was in accomplishing a set of goals or objects" (p. 31).

Criterion-referenced Assessments

Criterion-referenced assessment is a relatively new concept, articulated first, in the early 1960's by Glaser. Criterion referenced tests (unlike norm referenced tests such as the typical standardized IQ tests) do not purport to measure nor to describe the general learning ability of the child, nor do they offer to serve as predictors of future performance. Instead, criterion referenced instruments assess whether a child (or adult) can perform a particular task. The conditions under which the behavior is observed is clearly specified: "Given several sizes of an object, the child can seriate in order from largest to smallest." (Resnick, Wang, & Kaplan, 1973).

Teachers, using criterion referenced instruments are concerned with the child's mastery of specific tasks (or components of those tasks) rather than test scores.

The use of a criterion referenced approach to child assessment is desirable for a number of reasons. The outcomes allow teachers to develop specific individualized programs for each child based upon the child's actual skill levels in curriculum and developmental areas as diverse as counting, playing cooperativelym language elaborations, and climbing skills. A criterion referenced assessment instrument that encompasses all areas of development such the Pre-school Profile (1977) also provides the teacher with an integrated picture of the child that keeps in focus the interrelationships between developmental areas and allows teachers a ready review of prerequisite skills in each area. Finally, the criterion referenced approach provides a quick and objective way to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in promoting children's learnings.

Check Lists

Stevens and King (1976) points out that teacher-made tests and checklists are a common form of criterion referenced instruments (p. 123). Checklists are easy for teachers to use and can provide information on individual children, such as who uses which pieces of equipment or which children know which colors. One characteristic of a checklist is that it is prepared in advance, listing items related to what the teacher wants to find out. If the information desired had to do with evaluating children's knowledge of color names, the sheet could contain children's names down the left side of a predrawn grid and color names across the top. Most teachers find that it is well to leave space for unexpected responses, too. One teacher tells of a four year old puzzling over a not-too-true color sample of purple who said, after great pondering, "It's deep violet. No, amethyst." Then, "Okay," (in frustration) "so I don't know what color it is!" Allen, Rieke, Dmitriev, and Hayden (1971) suggested that on checklists requiring a "yes" or "no" answer (e.g., Does the child recognize

the letters in his or her name? Know at least eight names of other children in the group? Attend to a task independently for at least five minutes at a time?) that a third category be added, that of "sometimes." It is these "sometimes" areas that are often good starting places for teachers in providing additional learning experiences in that the task builds on existing approximations to needed skills.

The only real disadvantage to check lists is that many times they do not convey information as to the quality of the child's behavior - how well he or she accomplishes a given task, how long it takes, or how much teacher prompting and assisting from the teacher was required. Allen and Hickey (1981) developed a coded check sheet that does allow teachers to note in which interest area children are playing and the quality of their play in terms of several levels of involvements as predijined and coded. These teacher-collected data have proven to be valid, reliable, and also highly functional; that is, teachers can make informal program decisions for individual children based upon their data and subsequently follow up on a program alteration to note changes in specific children.

Rating Scales

Rating scales are used in some instances in an effort to get at the qualitative aspects of children's responses. They are more difficult to construct than simple behavioral checklists and are usually based upon reflections or past impressions about the child. The major drawback to rating scales is the subjectivity required by the teacher in responding to how well or how much of the time a child is performing in a particular fashion. For a useful overview of checklists and rating scales with many good examples, the student is referred to Irwin and Bushnell (1980) pp. 199-227).

Task Analysis

Teachers have always engaged in task analysis in working with children but it is only since the mid-sixties that the term has become a "regular" in the educator's vocabulary. Task analysis, in terms of formal definition, "involves

careful analysis of complex task performance, as in conservation of substance, in terms of the successive subskills prerequisite for success." (Evans, 1975, p. 217). Put more simply, task analysis is the "breaking down of a task into small, orderly, logical steps....progressing from the known, simple, and easy to the more difficult and complex....so that the child has recurring successes (Allen, 1980, p. 101). The key to successful task analysis is to "think small." The smaller the steps the better in that the child is given frequent opportunities to succeed, thereby moving through the steps of the task with fewer of the frustrations that can be so defeating for many children. Task analyses involves observing a child to see what he or she can do on a particular developmental task. Walking unaided across a walking board 24 inches off the ground is one example. The child may be willing to walk across a wide board placed flat upon the ground but refuse to even attempt that same walking board suspended between two A frames, even though other children the same age bound across unconcernedly. The wide board flat on the ground, is the first step in breaking the task down into its component parts for it is here that the child is successful. Walking unaided across the board in the company of other children is the last step to be mastered in this particular task analysis. In between may be as many as 20 small steps--the wide plank raised an inch or so at a time; gradually moving to a narrower plank (and perhaps lowering it to nearly ground level at first); withdrawing teacher's hand for brief moments after the child is crossing confidently holding on to the teacher's hand; finally, introducing other children to the equipment, one child at a time.

Teachers will need to employ task analysis, as needed by particular children learning particular tasks, during each of the larning formats. During periods related to routines some children may need systematic help in learning to hang up their coats or to independently get themselves a drink of water. During instructional times a teacher may use task analysis in helping children learn

spatial relationships (in, on, under, in between), cutting with scissors, or in putting together words and actions in a song. It might be mentioned in passing that many of the favorite nursery school songs lend themselves to task analysis almost spontaneously with little or no effort from teachers because of their refrains, rhyming words, and cumulative lists of characters. "Bought Me a Cat" and "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" are good examples. Finally, during exploration ti[illegible] teachers engage, and always have, in task analyses--putting out fewer and less complex unit blocks at the start of the school year; holding back on spray bottles at the water table until children have learned a series of motor and social controls (squeezing, pouring, pumping in ways that do not wet others); throwing bean bags from farther and farther away into smaller and smaller containers.

Specifying Objectives

Based upon the assessment of each child and using principles of task analysis specific learning objectives are set for each child. These objectives are different from the overall program objectives. Program objectives are derived from the underlying philosophical framework as discussed in chapter . There does, however, need to be a meshing of learning objectives for children and of the objectives of the program. Thus, one program objective might be that children who will be going to kindergarten in the fall should be able to independently manage their own coats, hats, mittens and scarves. This task then is built into the objectives for individual children all along the way. Several three year olds perhaps can do the whole routine except getting a zipper started. For some of these three year olds getting the zipper started may become an immediate teaching objective; for others of the three year olds work on zippers may be put off until much later when more basic fine motor skills have been mastered. On the other hand, some four year olds may have mastered only parts of the dressing and undressing objective. The missing parts become the teaching objectives, one after another, for those children. In addition, the teaching may be less casual than with the three year olds who

have still another year before kindergarten expectations are put upon them.

As always the three formats for learning provide the context for specifying learning objectives. Thus, depending upon the age and skill levels of the children enrolled in a classroom one might see objectives set forth as follows for particular children during routines, instructional periods, and exploration activities. Following are examples of learning objectives that might be set forth for particular children during routines.

Jill (4 years 7 months) Hangs up coat and puts mittens in coat pockets. Remembers to flush the toilet and use soap when washing hands.

Barney (2 years 7 months) At toileting pulls down his own pants and underpants after his belt and fly have been loosened for him. Flushes his own toilet and puts the seat down. Takes one piece of snack at a time.

Susie (5 years 5 months) Pours her glass approximately half full of juice or milk without a visual reminder marked on the glass. Counts out the appropriate number of napkins for each snack tray. Laces her own shoes; ties with assistance from the teacher.

During instruction times objectives for individual children would be equally diversified.

Jerri (5 years 7 months); (a developmentally delayed child) Holds a plastic glass half full of liquid in both hands and gets it to her mouth without spilling. Unfolds her napkin. Recognizes that her shoe is untied and asks to have it tied.

Diversity of individual objectives will also be noted during instructional formats, just as doing routine learnings.

Jerri, the child in the example above, may be expected during an instructional period only to point to the pile with "more" chips on it. Susie, on the other hand, may be given one pile of chips and is to make sets of five blue chips, five red, five yellow, and five white. Barney is given chips to stack and line up so he will simply get the "feel" for quantity, and the opportunity to perhaps voice quantity concepts such as having "lots" of chips.

Learning objectives are also built into the exploration format of the day for these are prime times, essentially the best time of the school day, for learning of all kinds. Many of the objectives will be the same as for other areas--perfecting certain fine motor skills; increasing span of attention (by how much and for how long depending, of course, upon the particular child); increasing counting skills, shape recognition, and color matching. In addition, teachers may have objectives for certain children that are best taught during exploration times. Such objectives might include helping certain children explore a wider range of activities and materials; working with some children to overcome fears about certain activities (as noted in the walking board examples); or working with a couple of reckless tricycle riders to get them to travel one way at a reasonable speed on the wheels toy path so that other children are not imperilled.

Basic developmental skills underlie a child's effectiveness in all learning; thus many objectives for individual children will cut across all three learning formats. Motor skills, for example, are relevant to almost any learning task that one can think of; even at story time, children must be able to maintain a posture and orient their heads toward the book. Usually, such skills develop almost automatically but for the occasional child an actual motor objective may be built into the music and story periods: a child may perhaps be in physical therapy and the therapists asks that the child sit on the floor with legs extended during story time and never be allowed to sit in W fashion. Certainly language objectives, cognitive objectives, and social skills objectives can and should be practiced in all three learning formats. Thus, some children in learning to button their coats, may enjoy counting the buttons. While this kind of a counting task may be an objective for the instructional aspect of the learning program, it can be practiced in a game-like way during a routine situation. One thing that the teacher must insure, however, is that the counting activity does not supercede the learning-to-button

task which may be a specified learning objective for the routines format.

There are quite likely no times when particular social skills objectives for particular children might not be practiced in all three formats. Sharing, so often an objective for so many young children, can be practiced anywhere: sharing academic materials, snack, space at the wash basin, the teacher's attention, these can be practiced throughout the day as can taking turns, working cooperatively (or independently) and returning materials to their designated place. Here again, the teacher's main concern should be that an objective that can be practiced in other contexts or at another time does not take the place of another, perhaps more basic objective. For example, if a three year old who has a reputation for hitting should yell out, "That's mine," instead of hitting another child who took the doll out of the carriage, the teacher does not use attempt to promote sharing. Instead the teacher responds to the child's verbal rather than physical outburst by confirming that the doll does indeed belong to the first child and that the other child will have to wait. Sharing requires verbal skills for negotiating, thus the teacher's response to the child's verbal outburst is a first step in acquiring more adroit (and acceptable) verbal responding.

Program Reevaluation

Thus far program adaptations have been discussed in terms of various mechanisms that underlie the process of assessment, task analysis, and the specification of learning objectives. Still another aspect of program adaptation has to do with frequent program reevaluation. Just as children's individual learning objectives come under frequent review as to their appropriate match for each child's level of performance in the various developmental areas so must the program itself undergo frequent review and adaptations. Such reevaluations and subsequent adaptations do not appear to be employed as widely as are assessments of children. Stevens and King (1976) suggest: "Evaluation in early childhood education is an underpracticed activity but an overused term;" generally

speaking, these authors feel that evaluative strategies are not generally implemented (p. 89). They go on to give a number of reasons in support of the importance of program evaluation but for the purpose of this text let us look at program evaluation only in terms of child learning and the basic question; is it happening. are children learning?

The issues addressed are basically two. The first has to do with how the program can best be adopted to provide opportunities for the immediate learnings needed by specific children. An example might be the specially transported child who arrives just at the close of outdoor play each morning. The transportation schedule cannot be rearranged, yet the child needs some outdoor time to work on large motor skills and to have fun out of doors as do the other children. What can be arranged in terms of program adaptation? The second issue is how can the program be adopted to fulfill the long-range learning goals that have been set for the current group? Perhaps there are several four year olds going to a kindergarten where certain pre-math and pre-reading skills are expected to be in place by the time the children start kindergarten. These expectations need to b considered as long range program goals for this group of four year olds, especially where parents concur that these premath and prereading skills are important for the children to acquire during preschool. No matter how strongly the early childhood educator may feel about the suitability of such activities for four year olds the family's emphasis on "the earlier the better" for teaching academic skills cannot be waved away; it must be dealt with, as must the community resistance to a doctrine of postponement for academic skills. As Almy (1975) points out, "the problem with postponement is that it fails to take into account the reality of cultural expectations for beginning reading to start no later than age six." (p. 179).

Program Adaptations

By readjusting the schedule in various ways, changing the learning materials, and altering the instructional activities and format, program adaptations can be

accomplished. Each of these items will be addressed separately.

Schedule

The daily schedule provides a basic foundation upon which the various learning experiences are arranged in some systematic order throughout the day. Consistency in the daily schedule, as pointed out in Chapter ___ is important in helping both teachers and children feel secure in knowing what comes next. At the same time, a schedule must be flexible and amenable to change as children's needs and the group's needs change. A static schedule is not conducive to child growth or program improvement.

Changes in the length of children's span of attention for various activities is always one indication that the daily schedule is likely to need adjusting. During the early part of the year, routine and transitions usually consume a great deal of time. Children have many self-help and self-management skills to learn in order to master routines and, the mastery of routines is important so that children can feel competent and independent. During this same period, many children's span of attention for activities calling for concentrated and independent focus, for large group participation, and for teacher structured activities may be much shorter. Gradually, however, most children begin to show a longer attention span for the latter type of activities almost concurrently with their greater facility in the self-help routines. Thus, as less time is needed for reoutines, more time can be devoted to other activities for which children are showing increasing interest and motivation. If, for example, a midmorning large group music and rhythms period follows a transition from outdoor play, a teacher can be ready to receive the first comers to music. The teacher can start the music activities so that those children who have mastered self-help skills can be engaged in music activities so that those children who have mastered self-help skills can be engaged in music activities for a longer period of time. The children at the other extreme of the continuum, those who need more time to learn to accomplish the various routines can still be served appropriately by the teacher who is managing the transition period.

Many programs have teacher-structured small group sessions where a variety of academic-related tasks are offered. The length of time that children are expected to attend to structured tasks can be varied from small group to small group, even though the overall time allotted may need to be the same for all. A group of children who have a comparatively short span of attention for teacher-directed activities can be offered a variety of free choice, quiet-type activities which they can select from shelves or bins set up in the area where the group meets. The teacher may also introduce a variety of learning experiences that allow for different kinds of movement - some activities that children sit at the table to do, others for which they stand up or get down on the floor for. A small group may also take a short "search" walk, for example, into the corridor or foyer or kitchen. Thus, even within fixed time slots, schedules can be flexible; ideally, though, preschools should not have to deal with too many rigid time constraints of this nature.

The time of year may also be a major factor in determining adjustments in the schedule of a preschool. Except in a few places where the climate is temperate the year around, the weather almost always has a strong bearing on the daily schedule. Usually, in the early weeks of school, the weather is fair and children can spend a good portion of the session out of doors. Such an arrangement is good for children new to a group experience and even for those "veterans" who may have returned from a relatively unscheduled summer. Outdoor play for both new and experienced children allows more physical freedom and imposes fewer noise constraints. Furthermore, for children who do not know each other very well, they can be farther apart, "keep their distance," yet play parallel more easily. As children get used to each other, outdoor play seems to be more conducive, too, to becoming part of a play group or remaining an independent without attracting undue attention. As autumn approaches and days grow colder, some children may want to come indoors earlier. This works out well, too, for by this time most

children have adapted to each other and to the constraints imposed by the indoor environment.

As an aside, it is recommended that all children play out of doors a part of each day unless the weather is severe. Regular outdoor play relieves tension for both children and teachers. Too, it is good for physical health and well-being--skin and muscle tone improves, resistance to colds and other minor ailments is built up, appetites are restored, sleep may come more easily, and most young children, given any encouragement at all from adults, love to play out of doors. Weather variations only add richness to outdoor learning experiences. A gentle rain creates an entirely different environment for children and teachers than does everyday fair weather; an entirely different experience, too, comes with sparkling frost or gusty winds. Children and teachers do need to be dressed for the weather, however. Also, the outdoor play period may need to be shortened on the days when the weather is inclement, so that children do not become chilled or wet. More often than not, it is teachers who balk at going outdoors rather than children. Children as a rule enjoy the experience if teachers are enjoying it too.

Major changes in the basic schedule need to be explained to children in advance. If, for example, a small group instructional period is to take the place of the large group music period that usually follows the transition from out of doors, this switch should be explained to the children the day before. The explanation might be given during the large group period: "Tomorrow, when we come in from outdoor play we will not come to music first. Instead, we will go to our regular work tables. We will have music just before we go home. It is well to rehearse the sequence with the children two or three times during this preliminary session. The next day, at the time of the actual change, children should be reminded as each starts the transition -- "Do you remember where you go after you hang up your coat?" Some children become extremely distressed even resistant to changes in routine. Teachers, therefore, need to exercise special care

during major changes to make sure that those children who have trouble adjusting to change are given special help and even more advance notice. In addition, program changes, or any other major change, should never be made on a Monday or immediately following a vacation. Children need the security of returning to the old and familiar after an absence before they are expected to adjust to new demands--an example, once again, of the "problem of the match."

Exploration learning periods need to be checked frequently, too, for adaptations in the kinds of materials available and the ways in which the materials are presented. As children gain proficiency in building with unit blocks and restoring the area when their play is finished, teachers add more blocks. The next adaptation is to add blocks of more complex shapes, that require greater eye-hand coordination on the part of the children. Accessory items may be added to the block area, too, in order to foster children's growing skills in creativity and in their imaginative and social play. These additions, introduced too soon, however, before children's block building skills are well-established, can impede the acquisition of block building skills and result in activities less conducive to good learning experiences (dive bombing the airplanes, driving the trucks about purposelessly).

Innumerable other ways could be sketched as to how teachers make adaptations in materials and equipment as assessments on the various children indicate increasing skills and the need for greater challenges. Walking and jumping boards can be raised; planks for sliding can be more steeply inclined; drills and planes can be introduced at the woodworking bench (for some children); while tricycles can be completely eliminated on certain days to provide opportunities for different kinds of play activities and play groupings to emerge.

As a part of program adaptation, teachers need not fear withholding certain materials in order to promote other learnings. The withholding is done matter-of-factly and the interesting alternatives that have been provided are described positively: "Tricycles stay in the shed today but there are many other things

to do - the cargo net is up; wheelbarrows and rakes and shovels are out; there is water painting; and housekeeping play under the trees.

In some instances of program adaptation, the amount of material is reduced in order to promote more advanced learnings. Tricycles will be used once again as an example. Fewer tricycles (within reasonable limits) require more sharing. In fact, rarely is there any reasons to have as many wheel toys as there are children. Such a ratio would almost automatically preclude sharing and cooperative play, at least in wheel toy activities. Other examples of reducing the amount of materials might be at the dough table by putting out only half as many rolling pins as children; only two flour shakers to be used by all, or only one of each shape of favorite cookie cutters.

In any program adaptation, individual children must be kept in mind. Forcing a child against his or her will to cooperate or to share materials is not likely to result in effective learning to share for that child. What the child is likely to learn is one of three things - to be more actively resistant, to withdraw, or to engage in devious ways of getting what he or she wants. For the child who cannot share, the teacher, in adapting the program, is probably going to have to add materials rather than to subtract them. In such a case the teacher may make many small cars available so that the child can have "lots" with many left over for other children. The teacher may also put out an inexhaustible supply of clay (which is inexpensive and forever reusable); or cut up a number of plastic straws for "birthday candles" in sand play. Given such evidence that teachers really do provide "plenty," that child can often relax and, with subtle help from the teacher, begin to share in certain small ways.

Seasonal changes will also dictate the kinds of materials that teachers present. Autumn calls for rakes for raking leaves, baskets for collecting seed pods and dried grasses, and for pumpkins, and gourds and cornstalks to be used in various activities. Snowy weather requires shovels, sleds, dishpans to twirl about in, and melting and freezing experiments. Warm weather brings out waterplay

of various kinds and bathing suit activities in places where the weather grows truly hot. Other considerations must be given the weather, too, in choosing activities: the warmer the weather, the fewer the number of vigorous activities that should be offered and the greater number of quieter activities. In many climates, where there are extremes of temperature during much of the year the entire program can be moved out of doors on the more temperate days. Academic tasks, creative art activities, music, stories, snack, all take on new and hitherto unexplored dimensions when presented out of doors.

Obviously holidays and special occasions call for special activities and materials, too. However, in the religious and ethnic pluralism of our society and immediate communities it seems better to forego emphasis on the traditional, commercialized holidays with their immensely over-extended and over-elaborated trappings. Programs can concentrate instead on those special happenings compatible with the beliefs and economics of all families. Celebrating Spring might include a duckling hatch, moths emerging from the cocoons that had been suspended by threads from the ceiling the autumn before, transplanting marigolds (instant bloom guaranteed), flying kites or running with crepe paper streamers. A most successful experience that one preschool group did year after year for an ongoing autumn experience was a trip to a large pumpkin patch well before the commercial harvest. After inspecting many rows of pumpkins, children and teachers selected pumpkins of various sizes, though none so large that children could not carry them about by themselves. A basketful of gourds were purchased too and both pumpkins and gourds served as props for all kinds of dramatic play during the next several weeks. When not being played with the pumpkins and gourds also served as seasonal decorations in the classroom. Eventually children and teachers cooked one or two of the pumpkins in various ways, roasted the seeds, and on Halloween day invited parents for a pumpkin bread and apple juice celebration.

Instructional Activities

The kinds of materials used in the instructional format are selected on the basis of children's skill levels and span of attention. It is upon these considerations that children are grouped and materials are optimally matched. Materials for instruction must constantly be revaluated and changed to provide children with just the right amount of increased complexity resulting in a successful rather than a frustrating challenge. For example, when initially teaching shapes and colors and relative size, teachers present only one concept at a time. Thus in teaching triangles, squares, and circles, the teacher might prepare shapes cut from construction paper and use uniform sizes and colors until the shape concept was mastered. At that point another parameter could be varied, perhaps one color at a time. Finally, the size dimension until eventually the the teacher varies children for whom these learning materials were prepared can make such responses as finding the biggest blue triangle, all the yellow shapes, or only the middle sized green and yellow triangles. The adaptation of instructional activities obviously, is closely tied in with task analysis; the teacher moves forward with the learning tasks, backs up, or moves out laterally, in order to adapt instructional materials to children's needs. Books will be increased in difficulty and in terms of amount of text (as contrasted to pictures) and subtlety of the content. The same holds true for songs, rhythmic activities, science experiences and various fine motor skills such as cutting with scissors. One group of children may be working primarily with tongs and basters of various sizes while another group of children is "cutting on the lines" to produce pieces that they will assemble into a colorful geometric collage. Thus, even though children may all be engaged in instructional activities, rarely are more than two or three children doing exactly the same thing at the same time.

Summary and Conclusions

Program adaptation is based upon ongoing reevaluation of program changes that occur throughout the year. Program changes are made in response to changes

in children's learning needs, to increases in their skill levels, and to their broadening interests. The first assessments, reevaluations, and program adaptations are usually more formal than later adaptations. Whether formal or informal, however, program change is an ongoing and integral component in arranging an optimum learning environment for young children.

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